

Lessons learnt lecture #4

Improving our process to deal with complaints more efficiently

James Mahaffy, Complaints Manager.

Adam Tolhurst, Complaints Officer.

18 August 2021



Lessons learnt lectures – the aim

- Showcase learning opportunities as widely as possible so they can be applied to our day-to-day work.
- Transparent by default – open session & post a video of the lecture, the slides and key learning points on our website.
- Volunteers for future sessions to James.Mahaffy@networkhomes.org.uk
- No names of any individuals or organisations– otherwise everything is potentially in scope to maximise the learning potential.



Structure

- The story
- The lessons
- The learning
- Questions/discussion

The story

Complaints team set up to deal with dissatisfaction with service provided to residents or customers. This covers over 20,000 properties and approx. 45,000 residents/customers.

Complaints team deals with not only Complaints, but Enquiries from MP and Councillors and facilitates compensation awarded to residents/customers following a complaint investigation.

The lessons

The items/topics open for discussion in this Lessons Learnt Lecture are:

1. Moving from a 3 to 2 Stage complaints process in April 2019.
2. Updating all relevant policy documents.
3. Being more accessible and approachable for all.
4. Adhering to the Housing Ombudsman Service “Complaint Handling Code”

Change to 2 Stage Complaints Process 1 of 2

Originally, a 3 Stage Complaints Process. In April 2019, the decision was made to move to a 2 Stage Complaints process.

A 3 Stage process was overly lengthy and at times very time consuming.

Resident feedback was key in making the change.

Resident/customer receives outcome to their complaint faster and provided their Ombudsman rights at the earliest opportunity.

Change to 2 Stage Complaints Process 2 of 2

Senior Management intervention is still a valid option if required as considered on a case-by-case basis.

Left it open to Housing Associations to decide whether a 2 or 3 Stage Complaints process works best for them and their residents.

The consensus amongst Housing Associations is that a 2 Stage Complaints process is the most efficient at dealing with complaints for both residents and customers.

Updating all relevant policy documents

Although the current agreement is that all documents will be reviewed at least every three years, in the last 12 months, all complaints relevant policy documents have been reviewed and updated this included:

- **Complaints Policy Document**
- **Compensation Policy Document**
- **Habitual Complainants Policy Document**

Moving forwards, we are looking to review all relevant documents every 12 months.

The Complaints team has also assisted in feeding into the review and updating of the ASB Policy Document and the process mapping of logging and allocating complaints received through our Customer Contact Centre.

Being more accessible and approachable

Various efforts have been made to ensure that residents or customers can raise their concerns in as many possible formats as possible.

The Complaints team has openly encouraged dialogue between teams and each other to objectively look at complaints and issue affecting residents/customers and offer guidance and support throughout Network Homes.

(Some of the topics discussed are listed overleaf)



Being more accessible and approachable continued....

- Whether an issue raised by a resident/customer should be considered a complaint or not.
- Potential Habitual issues.
- Compensation.
- MP and Councillor enquiries.
- Ombudsman Assistance.
- Complaints data, figures, root causes etc.
- Learning from mistakes.



Adhering to the Housing Ombudsman Service “Complaint Handling Code” 1 of 3

In 2020 and following the Government's White Paper on Social Housing the Housing Ombudsman Service introduced plans for the “Complaint Handling Code”.

The Complaint Handling Code set out explaining best practices and guidance on how, why and when complaints should be considered. This would therefore unify the complaints handling process across Housing Associations.

All Housing Associations were required to complete a self-certification against a number of questions and statements and in doing so agree to adhere to the code before 31 December 2020.

Adhering to the Housing Ombudsman Service “Complaint Handling Code” 2 of 3

The Complaint Handling Code went live on 01 January 2021, with any prospective changes (made to policy or process) to be fully interrogated by 31 March 2021.

Following a full review of the relevant policy documents (with the complaint handling code in mind) Network Homes completed the self-certification, which was approved on 14 December 2020. All changes made to policy and/or process were in place by 31 December 2020, well before the 31 March 2021 deadline.

Adhering to the Housing Ombudsman Service “Complaint Handling Code” 3 of 3

All Housing Associations are required to complete a new self-certification in line with the Complaint Handling Code before the end of each calendar year (31 December).

It is to be seen if the Ombudsman will provide revised guidance/feedback updating the code on a regular basis or as and when required.

The learning – what we will do 1 of 2

Continue and improve on all aspects of communication, take onboard feedback and engage with both residents and customers.

- **Immediate and meaningful responses.**
- **Resident panel meetings.**
- **Resident satisfaction surveys.**
- **Google/public reviews.**
- **Open door policy.**
- **Other/all means available.**

Keep all policy processes up-to-date and relevant.

- **Review all policy and process documents every 12 months.**
- **Continue to complete Complaint Handling Code Self-Certification process.**
- **Consider and implement guidance and best practise feedback from the Ombudsman.**

The learning – what we will do 2of 2

Encourage and engage in debate within Network Homes.

- **Complaints Roadshow.**
- **Blogs.**
- **Lessons Learnt Lectures.**

Questions & discussion

